



United States Mission to the OSCE

Opening Statement

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, September 19, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

Mr. Moderator, when signing the Helsinki Final Act on behalf of the United States, President Ford spoke of that historic document as “the yardstick by which our performance will be measured.” Thirty years later, the United States still believes that implementation is an essential aspect of the Helsinki process and that, therefore, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is one of the most important events on the OSCE calendar.

President Bush said recently that, “despite tremendous progress, much remains to be done to achieve a democratic, prosperous, and secure Euro-Atlantic community. The men and women who have dedicated themselves to promoting the work of the OSCE are on the front lines confronting tyranny. They labor to create a better, more peaceful world by promoting free and fair elections, strengthening respect for human rights, building democratic institutions, and enhancing security and economic prosperity.” Our work from the beginning has involved a unique partnership with civil society and human rights advocates.

One of those courageous individuals, Dr. Andrei Sakharov, succinctly summed up this process when he said, “The whole point of the Helsinki Accords is mutual monitoring, not mutual evasion of difficult problems.” This aptly describes our task in the coming days.

Mr. Moderator, during the past twelve months, we have witnessed both triumph and tragedy. Popular revolutions in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan testify to the enduring power of ideas reflected in the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE documents. While the supporters of democracy hailed these democratic breakthroughs, recalcitrant forces seek to beat back freedom’s progress.

We have Belarus, an outpost of tyranny, dominated by a government that humiliates its citizens by denying them the dignity of full human rights and freedom. This country has plunged ever deeper into repression, adopting measures designed to silence independent voices, monopolize information, and eliminate all elements of political opposition and democratization. OSCE commitments are farther than ever from realization.

Despite the fact that President Niyazov personally signed the Helsinki Final Act on behalf of his country on July 8, 1992, Turkmenistan remains on the fringes of the OSCE in terms of its non-implementation of its human rights commitments. There are too many human rights abuses in Turkmenistan to list in this opening statement, but the U.S. will raise our deep concerns about Turkmenistan under the Any Other Business segment at the end of this week.

The shootings at Andijon in Uzbekistan are symptomatic of a regime that actively seeks to quell all opposition and will go to any lengths to maintain its stranglehold on society. The

United States condemns the disproportionate use of force by Uzbek troops and security forces and renews its call for a full, credible and independent investigation of these events.

We urge the Russian Federation to fulfill its OSCE commitments and to halt its retreat from democracy and human rights. Russia is among the most dangerous places in the OSCE region for journalists. In addition to attacks on and politically motivated prosecution of journalists, we are deeply concerned by the shrinking independence and diversity of Russian media outlets and content. Over the past two years, incidents of government harassment of NGOs in Russia have increased, chilling the climate for civil society.

The United States continues to view the situation in Chechnya as one of the gravest challenges in the OSCE Human Dimension sphere, and is deeply concerned by the spread of abuses with impunity to other parts of the North Caucasus. While we recognize the presence of some terrorist elements in the conflict and grievous atrocities committed by separatist forces, this does not excuse human rights abuses committed by Russian forces, a lack of meaningful accountability for such abuses, or discriminatory attitudes on the part of Russian authorities towards displaced persons from Chechnya. We urge the Russian Federation to take meaningful steps to end the pattern of human rights abuses in Chechnya and to hold accountable those responsible.

Regrettably, some participating States – including Kazakhstan, a country seeking the OSCE chairmanship – still seek to deflect attention from their human rights practices. They resort to the Soviet-era argument that these matters are “internal affairs.” In fact, Principle VI of the Helsinki Final Act prohibits intervention in the internal affairs of other participating States, particularly armed intervention. In contrast, in the 1991 Moscow Concluding Document, the participating States “categorically and irrevocably declare[d] that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the CSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.”

Mr. Moderator, this year of anniversaries also marks the fifteenth year since adoption of the Charter of Paris in which our governments pledged to “build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations.” Mindful of this commitment and concerned about the effort by some to diminish OSCE’s democratic content, I would like to underscore my country’s full support for the outstanding election-related work undertaken by ODIHR, often in partnership with other bodies, including the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly.

There are those among us who seek to undermine the real purpose of OSCE election commitments through sophistry and clever misdirection. Our election standards and the objectivity of OSCE election observation teams have been under attack from within the OSCE for several years, at first very subtly, but lately more aggressively. This is one of the most serious challenges to our efforts to operationalize OSCE commitments since 1990.

Two supplementary human dimension meetings have already been convened to discuss OSCE elections issues. At each, the vast majority of participating States, NGOs and international organizations re-affirmed the continuing validity and comprehensiveness of our existing OSCE election-related commitments and the professionalism and value of OSCE election observation and assistance. The United States calls upon each of the governments around this table to resist attempts to diminish our common election standards, including

under the guise of reform. In particular, we should preserve OSCE election missions' independence from outside influence; maintain mission heads' ability to publicly assess the degree to which an election has met OSCE commitments on the day after voting; and ensure that ODIHR can appoint heads of observation and assessment missions based on ability and without the political involvement of governments. The OSCE's election standards, assistance and observation missions have fostered democratic systems in many countries throughout the OSCE region, but much remains to be done. Therefore, we must preserve this asset.

As President Bush personally declared earlier this year, it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democracy and freedom. The OSCE provides an excellent framework for advancing our common aims of promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The OSCE is uniquely positioned to highlight the interdependence of the human dimension, security and prosperity. Strengthening democracy and human rights improves our security, stability, and well-being. The United States looks forward to a candid and constructive discussion as we seek to match words with deeds in this unique process begun in Helsinki.